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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces five alternatives for delivery of continuing teacher education in reading in rural areas. The five programs range from the most modest effort, which involves the face-to-face relationship of the college instructor with rural teachers, to the other extreme, computer-assisted instruction through a mobile van. Two types of administrative structure at Bemidji State College for providing direct contact of the college instructor with rural teachers are described. One involves a federation of area schools which follows the Individually Guided Education (IGE) model. The federation requests specific types of inservice workshops which are delivered in various schools with graduate credit granted through college extension. The other approach, which is a competency-based program, provides undergraduate credits which may be applied toward a college degree for Head Start and day care teachers. The teachers attend workshops throughout the year at locations convenient to them, and they work through learning packages which provide content knowledge. Then at the working site of each student a college instructor checks a mastery of content knowledge as well as application of skills in the classroom. (Author/WR)

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# "Rural Teacher Education Through a Consortium of School Districts in Northern Minnesota"

Part of Symposium 10:

"Continuing Teacher Education

in Reading in Rural Areas"

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## Rural Teacher Education Through a Consortium of School Districts in Northern Minnesota

The problem of the ivory tower is not new. How can theories generated in colleges and universities be applied and integrated into classroom practice? The usual approach to the problem is for a school district to provide inservice teacher education and to encourage teachers through pay scale increments to return to college for graduate classes.

Schools in remote areas, however, may have difficulty obtaining speakers for inservice workshops. Teachers may also not have easy access to a college campus for graduate work. They are faced with the alternatives of commuting sometimes over 100 miles each way to attend an evening class at a college or of leaving their families to live on a college campus during a summer session. Either of these alternatives is a hardship for the rural teacher who, because of isolated geographical location, may be most in need of exposure to new educational developments.

During this symposium five approaches to delivering teacher education in reading in rural areas will be explored. This paper describes the most modest effort in which the college instructor maintains a face-to-face relationship with rural teachers. At the other extreme--represented by the last paper--instruction is carried out via a computer-assisted mobile van which eliminates the necessity for the college instructor to travel in the field.

After each speaker has presented his or her program, some criteria for evaluating teacher education programs will be presented. Each of the programs presented can be evaluated using these criteria in deciding what makes an effective delivery system in rural areas.

The most modest effort for delivering continuing teacher education is presented here. In addition to the regular college extension program, two types of innovative programs at Bemidji State College put college instructors in direct contact with rural teachers. One involves a league of schools in northern Minnesota which all follow the Individually Guided Education (IGE) model. The league coordinating committee, consisting of representatives from all the northern Minnesota IGE schools, first polls the teachers in member schools to determine the kinds of inservice programs needed. It then works through the Bemidji State College instructor who has been designated an IGE facilitator. The college person, whose facilitation duties constitute a partial teaching load, arranges for the appropriate college instructor(s) to conduct the desired inservice program in a location that is most convenient for teachers in member schools. For example, an inservice program on creating learning centers was offered last year in one of the schools. Sometimes the same workshop may be given in several locations so that teachers in all league schools may participate. Graduate credit is offered to teachers who wish it through the college extension division. The college instructor is thus paid through the college extension. Recently the league used funds from the National Institute of Education and the Sears Foundation to sponsor a Saturday workshop in a central location. College instructors from various state institutions spoke on topics that had been requested by the teachers in the league schools.

The other approach--used by the Child Development Associate program at Bemidji State College -- also involves a direct relationship between college instructors and rural teachers. Head Start and day care teachers enroll in a certification program, taking undergraduate credits which may also be applied toward a college degree. The training program is competency-based, allowing individuals to move through the program at their own rate. The teachers attend weekend workshops offered periodically during the year at locations convenient to them, and they work in learning packages which provide content knowledge. College personnel not only provide the workshop instruction and check the work done in connection with the learning packages, but they also visit the working site of each student. There the college instructor checks for mastery of competencies -- both content knowledge and skills application. The college instructor is thus able to give the rural teacher direct feedback on his classroom application of competencies.

Although the Head Start and day care teacher training program currently operates at Bemidji State College with federal funding, the model could be applied to graduate teacher training in reading. If competencies were specified for, say, a master's degree or certification in reading, mastery of some of the competencies could be demonstrated in the classroom while the teacher carries out the reading instructional program in his school. A college instructor could have, as part or all of his load, visitations to the rural schools. Content knowledge instruction could be offered through weekend workshops and through learning packages.

Both the programs described that operate through Bemidji State College provide college instruction at the working site of the rural teacher or at least at a nearby central location. The ivory tower problem is resolved by taking college courses off campus. The college professor must deal with instructional realities when he is in the classroom with the teacher. The rural teacher, in turn, has the opportunity to continue his education without great inconvenience or hardship. His graduate program can be tailored to his concerns if it is carried out in his locale.